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ENGLISH FOLK-TALES IN AMERICA.

THE BRIDE OF THE EVIL ONE.

IN former times there lived, on a great plantation far out in the country, the richest and most beautiful lady in the world. Her name was Maritta, and she was beloved by all who knew her, especially so by her parents, with whom she dwelt.

She was so rich that one could not count her wealth in many days ; and her home was a palace, filled with rare things from all quarters of the globe. Rich hangings of damask and tapestry adorned the walls, and massive and wonderfully carved furniture filled the rooms. Instead of gilt, as is usual in splendid mansions, the mirrors and pictures were framed in gold, silver, and even precious stones. Then, the dining-table was a wonder to behold — glittering with costly glass and golden service. The lady Maritta always ate from a jewelled platter with a golden spoon ; and her rooms were filled with wondrous vases, containing delicious spices and rare perfumes of many kinds.

Half the brave and daring fine gentlemen of her country had sought her hand in marriage ; but her parents always declared that each was not rich enough. So loath were her parents to give her up, that they finally said she should never marry unless she could view her suitor ten thousand miles down the road.

Now, as roads in general are not straight for so great a distance, — to say nothing of one's eyesight, — the poor lady was quite in despair, and had almost decided to remain a spinster.

At last the Evil One, seeing the covetousness of this old couple, procured for himself an equipage of great magnificence, and went a-wooing. His coach was made of beaten gold, so ablaze with precious stones that the sun seemed mean in comparison with it. Maritta beheld it thirty thousand miles off, and all the household were called out to view it ; for such a wonder had never been seen in that part of the world. But so great was the Evil One's power for conjuring that he was a very short time in arriving. He drove up to the door with so grand a dash and clatter and style that Maritta thought she had never beheld as princely a personage. When he had alighted most gracefully, uncovering and bowing to the mother and father, he knelt at the feet of Maritta, kissed her hand, and turning to her astonished parents, asked the hand of their daughter in marriage. So pleased were they all with his appearance that the wedding was hastened that very day. After the marriage compact was completed Maritta bade adieu to her proud parents ; and tripping lightly into his coach, they drove away with great effect.

Then they journeyed and journeyed, and every fine house or plantation which they approached, Maritta would exclaim: "Is that your home, my dear?" "No, darling," he would reply with a knowing smile, "my house is another cut to that." Still they journeyed: and just as Maritta was beginning to feel *very* weary they approached a great hill, from which was issuing a cloud of black smoke, and she could perceive an enormous hole in the side of the hill, which appeared like the entrance to a tunnel. The horses were now prancing and chafing at the bits in a most terrifying manner; and Maritta thought she saw flames coming from out their nostrils. Just as she was catching her breath to ask the meaning of it all, the coach and party plunged suddenly into the mouth of the yawning crater, and they sank down, down into that place which is called Torment. The poor trembling lady went into a swoon, and knew nothing more until she awoke in the House of Satan. But she did not yet know that 'it was the Evil One whom she had married, nor that, worse still, he was already a married man when she had made his acquaintance. Neither did she know that the frightful old crone was his other wife. Satan's manner had also undergone a decided change; and he, who had been so charming a lover, was now a blustering, insolent master. Lifting his voice until it shook the house, as when it thunders, he stormed around, beating the old hag, killing her uncanny black cat, and raising a tumult generally. Then, ordering the hag to cook him some buckwheat cakes for breakfast, he stamped out of the house, towards his blacksmith shop, to see how his hands were doing their work. While the wretched young wife sat in her parlor, looking very mournful and lovely, wiping her eyes and feeling greatly mystified, the old hag was turning her cakes on the griddle and growing more and more jealous of this beautiful new wife who was to take her place. Finally she left the cakes and came and stood by Maritta. "My child," quoth she, "my dear daughter, have you married that man?" "Yes, dame," replied the pretty Maritta. "Well, my child," said she, "you have married nothing but the Devil." At this the wretched young wife uttered a scream and would have swooned again, except that the hag grasped her by the arm, and putting a rough horny hand over Maritta's mouth, said in a low and surly voice, near her ear: "Hist! Should he hear you, he will kill us both! Only do my bidding, and keep a quiet tongue, and I will show you how to make your escape." At this Maritta sat up quite straight, and said in trembling tones: "Good dame, prithee tell me, and I will obey, and when I am free, I will send you five millions of dollars." But the forlorn hag only shook her head, replying: "Money I ask not, for it is of no use to such as I; but listen well."

Then seating herself on the floor at the feet of Maritta, her black hair hanging in tangles about her sharp ugly face, like so many serpents, she continued in this wise: "He has two roosters who are his spies, and you must give them a bushel of corn to pacify them — but I shall steal the corn for you. He also has two oxen; one is as swift of foot as the wind can blow; the other can only travel half as fast. You will have to choose the last, as the swift one is too well guarded for us to reach him. The slower one is tethered just outside the door. Come!" she cried to Maritta, who would have held back, "a faint heart will only dwell in Torment." At this thought the poor Maritta roused herself, and summoned all her strength. Her hair had now fallen loose and she was all in tears. But she mounted quickly, looking over her shoulder, to see if he was coming even then. "But dame," cried she, "will he not overtake me, if his ox is so much more fleet of foot than mine?" "Hold your slippery tongue," replied the hag, "and mark my words. Here is a reticule to hang at your side; this is a brickbat which I put in the bottom, and on that I place a turkey egg and a goose egg. When you feel the hot steam coming near you, drop the brickbat — for he will soon return, and missing you, will start on your chase, mounted on the ox. As he approaches near, you will feel the heat of his breath like hot steam. When you drop the brickbat a wall will spring up from the earth to the sky; and the Devil cannot pass it until he tears down every brick, and throws it out of sight. When you feel the hot steam again, drop the turkey egg, and there will come a river; and when he reaches this river he cannot cross over until his ox drinks all the water. Do the same with the goose egg, and a river will again flow behind you, thus giving you more time in which to reach home. Now off with you, and Devil take you, if you don't hold on tight and keep up your spirits. But, hark ye, if he catches you, I will poison you when you come back. At this terrible threat the lovely Maritta was so frightened that she forgot to thank the old hag or say good-by. In the twinkling of an eye the weird-looking creature had raised her mighty arm, and gurgling out a frightful laugh, she lashed the ox with a huge whip. Away he sped, verily as fleet as the wind, with the beautiful lady clinging on, her arms wound around his neck, and her soft face buried in his shaggy hair. Onward they floated, above the earth, it seemed to Maritta, over hills and plains, through brake and swamp. Just as the lady began to rejoice at being set free, — for it seemed a kind ox, and, after all, it was not so *very* hard to hold on, as she glided along, — she heard a piercing shriek behind her; and suddenly a burning hot steam seemed to envelop her. Thinking of the brickbat, in an instant she snatched it from the reticule — almost breaking the eggs in her

haste — and flung it behind her, nearly suffocated with the heat. Then she turned to look : and lo ! a great dark wall shut the awful sight from her gaze.

Onward, onward they sped, as she urged the ox by kind words, stroking his great neck with her delicate white hands. After they had traversed a great distance, Maritta began to think of home and the loved ones, when her reveries were broken by a gaunt 'black hand clutching at her hair over the back of the ox ; and again she felt the intense heat. Too terrified to put her hand in the reticule, she gave it a shake, and the turkey egg fell to the ground. On the instant water was flowing all about her, cooling the air and quite reviving her. Then a harsh voice fell upon her ear, crying : "Drink, drink, I tell you ; mighty hard on you, but you must drink !"

Soon the river was left far behind, and again Maritta aroused herself as she began to notice many familiar landmarks, which told that she was nearing home. After urging the ox on at a great rate for many more miles, she dropped the goose egg, in order to give herself ample time, although as yet she had not again felt the approach of her fiendish husband. At length the welcome sight of her own broad fields greeted her anxious and weary eyes ; and soon her dear home arose upon the horizon. With a few more strides the wonderful ox halted at her own very door, and she fell from his back more dead than alive. For some moments she was unable to rise and embrace her alarmed parents, who had seen her approach. They had only had time to retire into the house, when Satan rode up to the steps. Throwing himself from the ox, he banged for admittance, in a vastly different manner from that of his first visit. But the father confronted him, and he had to content himself with talking to Maritta over her father's shoulders, — while the poor lady was cowering in a corner of the room clinging to her mother. However, the touch of loving parental arms soon reassured her, and she demanded of Satan what he wished further. "I have," replied his Satanic majesty, "three questions to propound to you ; and if not properly answered, I shall take you by force again to my realms." Then placing his feet wide apart, with head thrown back, one arm akimbo on his hip, and snapping the fingers of his other hand, he sang in an impudent, swaggering manner : —

What is whiter than any snow ?
What is whiter than any snow ?
Who fell in the colley well ?

The gentle Maritta lifted her soft eyes, and raising her sweet voice sang in a pure and tender strain : —

Heaven is whiter than any snow,
 Heaven is whiter than any snow,
 Who fell in the colley well?

"Yes, ma'am," replied Satan, rather taken aback. "That 's right."
 Then he continued :—

What is deeper than any well?
 What is deeper than any well?
 Who fell in the colley well?

Maritta replied in the same strain :—

Hell is deeper than any well,
 Hell is deeper than any well,
 Who fell in the colley well?

Again the Evil One took up his strain :—

What is greener than any grass?
 What is greener than any grass?
 Who fell in the colley well?

Maritta lifted her voice a third time :—

Poison is greener than any grass,
 Poison is greener than any grass,
 Who fell in the colley well?

Greatly confounded at her answers, the Evil One stamped his feet in such a manner that smoke and sparks flew upward, and an odor of sulphur filled the room. Then turning on his heels he cried to the mother that he had left a note under the doorsteps with the Devil's own riddle on it.

A thousand or more acres of green corn grew about the house; and the Devil, pulling it all up by the roots, carried it in his hands, tore the roof off the mansion, and raising a fearful storm, disappeared in it. When the storm had abated, the mountains around about were all levelled to the ground. After the panic caused by his wonderful conjuring had subsided, the mother bethought herself of the note, and when found it read as follows :—

Nine little white blocks into a pen,
 One little red block rolled over them.

None could guess it save Maritta, who said it meant the teeth and tongue.

Elizabeth Johnston Cooke.

MACON, GA.

NOTE.—The above story was told me by "Old William," my negro gardener, in New Orleans. He said that he was born, and mostly brought up, in Martinique — although he had lived many years in Louisiana. He spoke, quite well for a negro, English, French, and Spanish, and was altogether a "character." He claimed to know a great many similar stories.